

REMEMBERING THE SACRED SITE OF PUVUNGNA, A PRESENTATION TO THE NATIVE AMERICAN HERITAGE COMMISSION, JULY 19, 2019

Remembering our victory in halting the desecration of Puvungna

Honoring those who protected Puvungna, including the Native American Heritage Commission

Respecting our Ancestors, culture, and history

Sustaining our connection to the land, to all our relations, and to our community

At its July meeting, the California Native American Heritage Commission will host a presentation to honor those who defended Puvungna a quarter century ago.

It is important to remember this victory as the struggle to protect and preserve natural spaces for prayer and ceremony continues. Respect for the history and culture of California's first peoples is best taught by those who continue to practice tribal ways and communicate tribal values.

Tongva and Acjachemen leaders will thank the NAHC for filing the lawsuit that ultimately prevented California State University Long Beach from developing the land and acknowledge those tribal members who also sued CSULB, and thank the Save Puvungna Coalition, CSULB faculty and students, and the many individuals who brought this issue to the attention of the campus and larger community and won their support. The lawyers and judges who used their knowledge of the legal system to challenge prejudice and bad intentions will also be recognized.

Puvungna holds the power to sustain us as we struggle to be protectors of all our relations. Here, one can feel the presence of the Ancestors in every living thing and in the wind itself. In caring for this place, we are also helped and healed.

Background

On June 18th, 1993, the NAHC met in Malibu to hear public testimony and consider opposing CSULB's plans to build a commercial center on the National Register Site of Puvungna. For two weeks prior to that meeting Lillian Robles, Acjachemen elder, accompanied by other tribal and community members, had occupied the sacred site, holding a prayer vigil on the land until the NAHC heard their concerns. Addressing the Commission, the community spoke of the need to

deny the planned development as well as a "cultural study" proposed by the University which would have involved digging trenches and disturbing a known burial site.

The rest is history. The NAHC agreed that the site was sacred and should not be disturbed. Along with the Native American plaintiffs, the NAHC legally challenged CSULB in court. To this day, these lawsuits remain a unique and pivotal legal battle and a tribute to the courage and conviction of those who united to protect Puvungna. No strip mall was built on the 22-acre meadow. Today there are cultural gatherings and ceremonies, including the Ancestor Walk attended by hundreds of community members and an annual visit by the Seri people. This remains the only spot on campus that is not paved or landscaped. The pines where the prayer vigil began, the live oaks, and the eucalyptus grove, the hawks, and an occasional coyote remind us of our connection to the land and to the Ancestors, buried and reburied here. We are grateful to Creator, to those who contributed in the past and to all who care for Puvungna today.

"The Commission has determined that any digging, excavation, or grading would result in damage to the sacred/religious site. Therefore the Commission recommends complete avoidance of the site as the appropriate and only acceptable mitigation measure. The religious and sacred significance of the site cannot be determined by trenching and excavation. Archaeology cannot determine religious and cultural significance, only the Indian people can determine those values." NAHC, June 18, 1993